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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 005320

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: RSS FLEXES POLITICAL MUSCLES, DEMANDS ADVANI'S REMOVAL

REF: A. NEW DELHI 4315

[B.](#) NEW DELHI 4232

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The right-wing Hindutva Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) asserted its political dominance of the BJP on July 8, calling for the removal of LK Advani from his party leadership positions, including the presidency and head of the parliamentary delegation. Pundits expect the move to succeed, resulting in greater RSS control of the BJP and a shift towards an even more radical Hindutva agenda. None of Advani's likely successors have his national credibility. RSS domination of the BJP would further alienate Indian voters, and continue the party's downward slide. Continued BJP infighting benefits Congress, as PM Manmohan Singh builds his credentials as a respected domestic politician and an international statesman. Congress sees an opening to go after BJP governments in the Hindi heartland and eventually win an insurmountable parliamentary majority. End Summary.

The RSS Attacks its Own

¶2. (C) On July 8, the RSS demanded that the BJP remove LK Advani, himself an RSS member, from his post as party President following his controversial remarks in June (Reftel) characterizing Muhammad Ali Jinnah as a secularist. RSS spokesman Ram Madhav told us on June 9 that the RSS leadership is furious at Advani and is looking for "systematic changes to ensure that the RSS core ideology is not diluted." Veteran BJP leader JP Mathur commented to us on June 11 that Advani's future "does not look bright" and that the RSS would most likely succeed in removing him from the presidency. He added that the RSS might wait until after the October-November state elections in Bihar to sack Advani, but would not relent on its removal demand. Mathur suggested that the RSS is backing Murli Manohar Joshi, whose ideological purity is more certain, to take over from Advani until someone from the next generation of leaders is ready for the job.

¶3. (C) In a comment clearly aimed at Advani, state-level RSS chiefs, meeting in Surat on July 9, expressed concern over "ideological erosion" in the BJP. The RSS statement was a rare public attack on the man long considered to be in league with the RSS and the party's right wing. This atypical airing of internal BJP issues indicates the seriousness of the struggle between moderate and right-wing elements of the party, and the determination of the RSS to impose its will.

¶4. (C) The RSS and BJP will continue negotiations to engineer a compromise that will allow Advani to stay on, but political insiders expect that he will not last long. RSS hard-liners have laid the groundwork for a rightward shift by removing the moderate liaisons between the RSS and BJP, and installing a hard-liner who has repeatedly called for Advani's resignation.

Comment: Hindutva, Even if it Kills Us

¶5. (C) The RSS move signals that the battle between the right wing and moderate constituencies of the BJP has come to a head. The RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) are determined to control the party and take it down a more fundamentalist path. If they succeed, that will further splinter the NDA coalition and hasten the BJP's decline as a force in Indian national politics. Congress is delighted by this turn of events, as the BJP leadership appears increasingly out of step with the moderate middle ground that the majority of Indians support in the wake of the Ayodhya attack. The BJP's decline has spurred Congress insiders to begin debating the possibility of unseating BJP governments in the Hindi heartland and eventually calling a new national election to secure a strong UPA majority in Parliament, free of reliance on the left. Advani, ironically, tried to shift the BJP toward the middle and possibly electoral success, but the RSS and VHP clearly care more for ideological purity, no matter the cost.

BLAKE